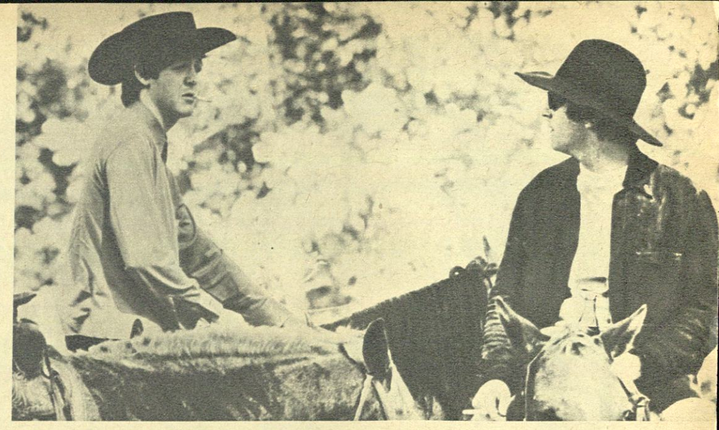
THE BEATLES GO WEST

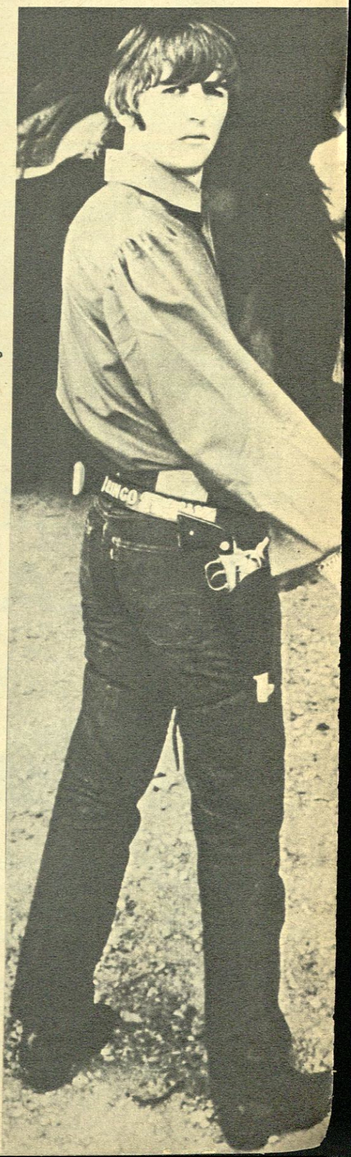
THE little girl in pigtail
standing by the white-painte
five-bar gate, rubbed her eye
and nearly fainted. Her bi
sister picked her up and sh
too, pinched herself.
Were they dreaming? Coul
those four horsemen riding u
the Ozark mountains in deepe
Missouri really be...?
No, ridiculous. Yet the little on
looked familiar. Very familia
That hair; that nose.
Yes it was. It was Ringo.
The little girl screame
"It's The Beatles. The Beatle



"Hey, pardner, don't look now but they're hot on our trail!" It's no posse after these cowboys, though—just eager fans!

It's been a long day's ride—and our three weary cowpokes pause for a rest.

You've got the wrong Ringo! I'm no gun-slinger—drum sticks are my only real weapons!



She could still barely believe it. America was three thousand miles long and almost as wide. There were over 188 million people living in it. Yet she and her big sister were face to face with the famous foursome in this sleepy corner of the Union, a few rugged miles from the Arkansas stateline and hundreds of miles from the nearest big town.

I rode by first on a mean white horse called "Badman" and the child screamed: "It is them. Tell me it is."

"Yes," I said. "It is."

"Oooh," she said, and this time she fell over. Paul rode by. "Morning," he said, doffing his black Stetson with the brim stylishly curled. Then George came up with a big grin: "Hello."

The girl slowly stood up, her eyes widening. Her big sister stood stock-still, both hands clasped over her mouth: "Hi," said John, nodding gravely, his eyes hidden by dark glasses.

"Hello love," said Ringo with a big smile.

"My oh my," said the girls together, forgetting even to ask for autographs.

The Beatles, astride these rough tough farm horses, plodded on. Brian Epstein was with them, and their road manager Neil Aspinall—all of us, excepting Brian, hopeless amateurs in the saddle. But loving it.

Paul, in a scarlet shirt, on a big gelding called "Farmboy" looked smartest. Like an old-time gambler from a river boat, having a day off. His horse was fast and quiet. John's was a little irritable and it didn't like mine.

Also it was small so that John, bulky and stooped, his hat pulled firmly over his eyes and legs swinging, looked like a dour Mexican bandit on a donkey.

George was probably the wildest rider. He was on a chocolate gelding called "Snowball." He rode a desperate race over a ploughed field which was won by Neil Aspinall who came from nowhere on a huge stallion called "Majesty," who galloped like something out of the Kentucky Derby.

It was all happening while The Beatles were relaxing for a couple of days towards the end of their fabulous U.S. tour. They were in dire need of a rest and this was the spot, it seemed, to get one. A lonely ranch at a place called Alton in south South Missouri.

It was a city-dwellers dream. Mountain and stream, forest and glade and rough clean clay.

For some days the tour had been very Western. Police on horseback chasing crowds from the open stage in New Orleans; gifts of Stetsons in Kansas City. In Dallas, Texas, cowboy booted fans had given them Western gunbelts with their names on them, and on the ranch they were sporting guns and holsters—the gift of Colonel Tom Parker, manager of Elvis.

Ringo thought it was great. He and George had bought flowing, full-sleeved shirts in Hollywood—Ringo's brick-red, George's gold. The offer of horse-riding gave them the chance to dress up like real cowboys. With their Beatle-boots, the image was complete.

But they hadn't reckoned with those saddles. They were really hard. Like riding on iron and if you're not used to riding on iron, you're wise to take it easy.

The Beatles didn't. They rode hard and long, for about twelve miles and about three hours. Up mountain-sides and through a mighty river—tributary of the great Mississippi. Down slippery shale-covered slopes. Dodging overhanging branches and terrific brambles.

And this, after an all-night card school when no-one had any sleep.

Their host at the Alton ranch bore the name of Pigman but he didn't let that get him down. He had made a million dollars and he owned an airline and as far as an eagle's eye could see the land was his.

After the riding, The Beatles went fishing. Paul was best—he caught a cake-mix packet—and George gave up and went off. Ever curious, he photographed curious insects with his new Pentax camera.

At night, The Beatles relaxed in the ranch, eating fresh trout and home-made apple pie and pumpkins. Hill-billy music spilled from the radio and outside it was all peace and hazy heat and the hum, hum, hum of ten thousand crickets.

But tomorrow was to bring hundreds of fans by coach from far and wide to peer at The Beatles.

By the time they had left Alton and jogged the ninety miles by farm van to the tiny airport at Walnut Ridge, the entire neighbourhood had gathered at the airport to see them off.

It was Beatlemania in Arkansas and, as a gnarled cowhand observed, "If you can make it there, you can make it any place."

DEREK TAYLOR